



Organizational Culture in Higher Education: Defining the Essentials

Author(s): William G. Tierney

Source: *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jan. - Feb., 1988), pp. 2-21

Published by: Ohio State University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1981868>

Accessed: 02/08/2010 12:44

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ohiosup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Ohio State University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Higher Education*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Organizational Culture in Higher Education

Defining the Essentials

Within the business community in the last ten years, organizational culture has emerged as a topic of central concern to those who study organizations. Books such as Peters and Waterman's *In Search of Excellence* [37], Ouchi's *Theory Z* [33], Deal and Kennedy's *Corporate Cultures* [20], and Schein's *Organizational Culture and Leadership* [44] have emerged as major works in the study of managerial and organizational performance.

However, growing popular interest and research activity in organizational culture comes as something of a mixed blessing. Heightened awareness has brought with it increasingly broad and divergent concepts of culture. Researchers and practitioners alike often view culture as a new management approach that will not only cure a variety of organizational ills but will serve to explain virtually every event that occurs within an organization. Moreover, widely varying definitions, research methods, and standards for understanding culture create confusion as often as they provide insight.

The intent for this article is neither to suggest that an understanding of organizational culture is an antidote for all administrative folly, nor to imply that the surfeit of definitions of organizational culture makes its study meaningless for higher education administrators and researchers. Rather, the design of this article is to provide a working framework to diagnose culture in colleges and universities so that distinct problems can be overcome. The concepts for the framework

William G. Tierney is assistant professor and research associate at the Center for the Study of Higher Education at The Pennsylvania State University, 123 Willard Bldg., University Park, Pa. 16802.

Journal of Higher Education, Vol. 59, No. 1 (January/February 1988)
Copyright©1988 by the Ohio State University Press

come from a year-long investigation of organizational culture in American higher education.

First, I provide a rationale for why organizational culture is a useful concept for understanding management and performance in higher education. In so doing, I point out how administrators might utilize the concept of culture to help solve specific administrative problems. The second part of the article considers previous attempts to define culture in organizations in general, and specifically, in colleges and universities. Third, a case study of a public state college highlights essential elements of academic culture. The conclusion explores possible avenues researchers might examine in order to enhance a usable framework of organizational culture for managers and researchers in higher education.

The Role of Culture in Management and Performance

Even the most seasoned college and university administrators often ask themselves, “What holds this place together? Is it mission, values, bureaucratic procedures, or strong personalities? How does this place run and what does it expect from its leaders?” These questions usually are asked in moments of frustration, when seemingly rational, well-laid plans have failed or have met with unexpected resistance. Similar questions are also asked frequently by members new to the organization, persons who want to know “how things are done around here.” Questions like these seem difficult to answer because there is no one-to-one correspondence between actions and results. The same leadership style can easily produce widely divergent results in two ostensibly similar institutions. Likewise, institutions with very similar missions and curricula can perform quite differently because of the way their identities are communicated to internal and external constituents and because of the varying perceptions these groups may hold.

Institutions certainly are influenced by powerful, external factors such as demographic, economic, and political conditions, yet they are also shaped by strong forces that emanate from within. This internal dynamic has its roots in the history of the organization and derives its force from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization’s workings. An organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level.

The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, writes that traditional culture, “denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life” [25, p. 89]. Organizational culture exists, then, in part through the actors’ interpretation of historical and symbolic forms. The culture of an organization is grounded in the shared assumptions of individuals participating in the organization. Often taken for granted by the actors themselves, these assumptions can be identified through stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes that emerge from individual and organizational behavior.

Geertz defines culture by writing, “Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning” [25, p. 5]. Thus, an analysis of organizational culture of a college or university occurs as if the institution were an interconnected web that cannot be understood unless one looks not only at the structure and natural laws of that web, but also at the actors’ interpretations of the web itself. Organizational culture, then, is the study of particular webs of significance within an organizational setting. That is, we look at an organization as a traditional anthropologist would study a particular village or clan.

However, not unlike traditional villagers, administrators often have only an intuitive grasp of the cultural conditions and influences that enter into their daily decision making. In this respect they are not unlike most of us who have a dim, passive awareness of cultural codes, symbols, and conventions that are at work in society at large. Only when we break these codes and conventions are we forcibly reminded of their presence and considerable power. Likewise, administrators tend to recognize their organization’s culture only when they have transgressed its bounds and severe conflicts or adverse relationships ensue. As a result, we frequently find ourselves dealing with organizational culture in an atmosphere of crisis management, instead of reasoned reflection and consensual change.

Our lack of understanding about the role of organizational culture in improving management and institutional performance inhibits our ability to address the challenges that face higher education. As these challenges mount, our need to understand organizational culture only

intensifies. Like many American institutions in the 1980s, colleges and universities face increasing complexity and fragmentation.

As decision-making contexts grow more obscure, costs increase, and resources become more difficult to allocate, leaders in higher education can benefit from understanding their institutions as cultural entities. As before, these leaders continue to make difficult decisions. These decisions, however, need not engender the degree of conflict that they usually have prompted. Indeed, properly informed by an awareness of culture, tough decisions may contribute to an institution's sense of purpose and identity. Moreover, to implement decisions, leaders must have a full, nuanced understanding of the organization's culture. Only then can they articulate decisions in a way that will speak to the needs of various constituencies and marshal their support.

Cultural influences occur at many levels, within the department and the institution, as well as at the system and state level. Because these cultures can vary dramatically, a central goal of understanding organizational culture is to minimize the occurrence and consequences of cultural conflict and help foster the development of shared goals. Studying the cultural dynamics of educational institutions and systems equips us to understand and, hopefully, reduce adversarial relationships. Equally important, it will enable us to recognize how those actions and shared goals are most likely to succeed and how they can best be implemented. One assumption of this article is that more often than not more than one choice exists for the decision-maker; one simple answer most often does not occur. No matter how much information we gather, we can often choose from several viable alternatives. Culture influences the decision.

Effective administrators are well aware that they can take a given action in some institutions but not in others. They are less aware of why this is true. Bringing the dimensions and dynamics of culture to consciousness will help leaders assess the reasons for such differences in institutional responsiveness and performance. This will allow them to evaluate likely consequences before, not after they act.

It is important to reiterate that an understanding of organizational culture is not a panacea to all administrative problems. An understanding of culture, for example, will not automatically increase enrollments or increase fund raising. However, an administrator's correct interpretation of the organization's culture can provide critical insight about which of the many possible avenues to choose in reach-

ing a decision about how to increase enrollment or undertake a particular approach to a fund-raising campaign. Indeed, the most persuasive case for studying organizational culture is quite simply that we no longer need to tolerate the consequences of our ignorance, nor, for that matter, will a rapidly changing environment permit us to do so.

By advocating a broad perspective, organizational culture encourages practitioners to:

- consider real or potential conflicts not in isolation but on the broad canvas of organizational life;
- recognize structural or operational contradictions that suggest tensions in the organization;
- implement and evaluate everyday decisions with a keen awareness of their role in and influence upon organizational culture;
- understand the symbolic dimensions of ostensibly instrumental decisions and actions; and
- consider why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about institutional performance.

Many administrators intuitively understand that organizational culture is important; their actions sometimes reflect the points mentioned above. A framework for organizational culture will provide administrators with the capability to better articulate and address this crucial foundation for improving performance.

Thus far, however, a usable definition of organizational culture appropriate to higher education has remained elusive. If we are to enable administrators and policy makers to implement effective strategies within their own cultures, then we must first understand a culture's structure and components. A provisional framework will lend the concept of culture definitional rigor so that practitioners can analyze their own cultures and ultimately improve the performance of their organizations and systems. The understanding of culture will thus aid administrators in spotting and resolving potential conflicts and in managing change more effectively and efficiently. However, if we are to enable administrators and researchers to implement effective strategies within their own cultures, then we first must make explicit the essential elements of culture.

Cultural Research: Where Have We Been

Organizations as Cultures

Ouchi and Wilkins note: "Few readers would disagree that the

study of organizational culture has become one of the major domains of organizational research, and some might even argue that it has become the single most active arena, eclipsing studies of formal structure, of organization-environment research and of bureaucracy” [34, pp. 457–58].

Researchers have examined institutions, organizations, and sub-units of organization as distinct and separate cultures with unique sets of ceremonies, rites, and traditions [30, 32, 38, 49]. Initial attempts have been made to analyze leadership from a cultural perspective [3, 39, 43, 45]. The role of cultural communication has been examined by March [28], Feldman and March [22], and Putnam and Pacanowsky [41], Trujillo [50], Tierney [46], and Pondy [40]. Organizational stories and symbols have also been investigated [17, 18, 29, 47].

Recent findings indicate that strong, congruent cultures supportive of organizational structures and strategies are more effective than weak, incongruent, or disconnected cultures [7, 27]. Moreover, the work of numerous theorists [5, 26, 31, 42] suggests that there is an identifiable deep structure and set of core assumptions that may be used to examine and understand culture.

Colleges and Universities as Cultures

Numerous writers [11, 21] have noted the lack of cultural research in higher education. Dill has commented: “Ironically the organizations in Western society which most approximate the essential characteristics of Japanese firms are academic institutions. They are characterized by lifetime employment, collective decision making, individual responsibility, infrequent promotion, and implicit, informal evaluation” [21, p. 307]. Research in higher education, however, has moved toward defining managerial techniques based on strategic planning, marketing and management control.

Higher education researchers have made some attempts to study campus cultures. Initially, in the early 1960s the study of culture primarily concerned student cultures [2, 6, 12, 19, 35, 36]. Since the early 1970s Burton Clark has pioneered work on distinctive colleges as cultures [13], the role of belief and loyalty in college organizations [14], and organizational sagas as tools for institutional identity [15]. Recent work has included the study of academic cultures [1, 23, 24], leadership [8, 10, 48], and the system of higher education as a culture [4, 16]. Thus, a foundation has been prepared on which we can build a framework for studying culture in higher education.

A Cultural Framework: Where We Might Go

Anthropologists enter the field with an understanding of such cultural terms as “kinship” or “lineage.” Likewise, productive research depends on our being able to enter the field armed with equally well defined concepts. These terms provide clues for uncovering aspects of organizational culture as they also define elements of a usable framework. Necessarily then, we need to consider what cultural concepts can be utilized by cultural researchers when they study a college or university. This article provides an initial attempt to identify the operative cultural concepts and terms in collegiate institutions.

The identification of the concepts were developed through the analysis of a case study of one institution. By delineating and describing key dimensions of culture, I do not presume to imply that all institutions are culturally alike. The intense analysis of one institution provides a more specific understanding of organizational culture than we presently have and presumably will enable researchers to expand upon the framework presented here.

Of the many possible avenues that exist for the cultural researcher to investigate, table 1 outlines essential concepts to be studied at a college or university. That is, if an anthropologist conducted an in-depth ethnography at a college or university and omitted any mention of institutional mission we would note that the anthropologist had overlooked an important cultural term.

TABLE 1
A Framework of Organizational Culture

Environment:	How does the organization define its environment? What is the attitude toward the environment? (Hostility? Friendship?)
Mission:	How is it defined? How is it articulated? Is it used as a basis for decisions? How much agreement is there?
Socialization:	How do new members become socialized? How is it articulated?
Information:	What do we need to know to survive/excel in this organization? What constitutes information? Who has it?
Strategy:	How is it disseminated? How are decisions arrived at? Which strategy is used? Who makes decisions?
Leadership:	What is the penalty for bad decisions? What does the organization expect from its leaders? Who are the leaders? Are there formal and informal leaders?

Each cultural term occurs in organizational settings, yet the way they occur, the forms they take, and the importance they have, differs dramatically. One college, for example, might have a history of formal, autocratic leadership, whereas another institution might operate with an informal, consensually oriented leader. In order to illustrate the meaning of each term I provide examples drawn from a case study of a public institution identified here as "Family State College." The data are drawn from site visits conducted during the academic year 1984–85. Participant observation and interviews with a random sample of the entire college community lend "thick description" [25] to the analysis. Each example highlights representative findings of the college community.

Family State College

"The intensity of an academic culture," writes David Dill, "is determined not only by the richness and relevance of its symbolism for the maintenance of the professional craft, but by the bonds of social organization. For this mechanism to operate, the institution needs to take specific steps to socialize the individual to the belief system of the organization. . . . The management of academic culture therefore involves both the management of meaning and the management of social integration" [21, p. 317]. Family State College offers insight into a strong organizational culture and exemplifies how administrators at this campus utilize the "management of meaning" to foster understanding of the institution and motivate support for its mission.

In dealing with its environment Family State College has imbued in its constituents a strong feeling that the institution has a distinctive purpose and that the programs reflect its mission. By invigorating old roots and values with new meaning and purpose, the president of Family State has largely succeeded in reconstructing tradition and encouraging a more effective organizational culture. As with all executive action, however, the utilization, strengths, and weaknesses of a particular approach are circumscribed by institutional context.

Environment

Founded in 1894, Family State College exists in a fading industrial town. The institution has always been a career-oriented college for the working class in nearby towns and throughout the state. "I came here," related one student, "because I couldn't afford going to another school, and it was real close by." Fifty percent of the students remain in the local area after graduation, and an even higher percent-

age (80 percent) reside in the state. In many respects the city of Family and the surrounding area have remained a relatively stable environment for the state college due to the unchanging nature of the working-class neighborhoods. An industrial arts professor explained the town-gown relationship: "The college has always been for the people here. This is the type of place that was the last stop for a lot of kids. They are generally the first generation to go to college and college for them has always meant getting a job."

When Family State's president arrived in 1976, he inherited an institution in equilibrium yet with a clear potential to become stagnant. The institution had low visibility in the area and next to no political clout in the state capital. Family State was not a turbulent campus in the late 1970s; rather, it was a complacent institution without a clear direction. In the past decade the institutional climate has changed from complacency to excitement, and constituents share a desire to improve the college.

The college environment provided rationales for change. Dwindling demand for teachers required that the college restructure its teacher-education program. A statewide tax that eliminated "non-essential" programs in high schools reduced the demand for industrial arts at Family State. New requirements by state hospitals brought about a restructured medical-technology program. The college's relationship to its environment fostered a close identification with its working-class constituency and prompted change based on the needs of a particular clientele.

Mission

Individuals spoke of the mission of the college from one of two angles: the mission referred either to the balance between career-oriented and liberal arts programs or to the audience for whom the college had been founded—the working class. Although people spoke about the mission of the college in terms of both program and clientele, the college's adaptations concerned programmatic change, not a shift in audience. That is, in 1965 the college created a nursing program that easily fit into the mission of the college as a course of study for working-class students. An industrial-technology major is another example of a program that responded to the needs of the surrounding environment and catered to the specified mission of the institution. Rather than alter or broaden the traditional constituency of the institution, the college tried to create new curricular models that would continue to attract the working-class student to Family State.

As a consequence, the college continues to orient itself to its traditional clientele—the working people of the area. The city and the surrounding area have remained a working-class region throughout the college's history; the town has neither prospered and become middle class nor has it faded into oblivion. Continuing education programs and the courtship of adult learners have broadened the clientele of the college while maintaining its traditional, working-class constituency.

The president frequently articulates his vision of the institutional mission in his speeches and writing. One individual commented: "When I first came here and the president said that 'we're number one' I just thought it was something he said, like every college president says. But after [you're here] awhile you watch the guy and you see he really believes it. So I believe it too." "We are number one in a lot of programs," said the president. "We'll go head to head with a lot of other institutions. Our programs in nursing, communication, and industrial technology can stack up against any other state college here. I'd say we're the best institution of this kind in the state."

Presidential pronouncements of excellence and the clear articulation of institutional mission have a two-fold import. First, institutional mission provides the rationale and criteria for the development of a cohesive curricular program. Second, the president and the other organizational participants have a standard for self-criticism and performance. All too often words such as "excellence" can be so vague that they have no measurable meaning. Family State however, can "stack up against any other state college." That is, rather than criterion-referenced performance measures such as standardized tests and achievement levels of incoming students, Family State College has standards of excellence that are consistent with the historic mission of state colleges.

Socialization

One individual who had recently begun working at the college noted: "People smiled and said hello here. It was a friendly introduction. People said to me, 'Oh, you'll really love it here.' It was that wonderful personal touch. When they hire someone here they don't want only someone who can do the job, but someone who will also fit in with the personality of the place." One individual also noted that, soon after he arrived, the president commented on how well he did his work but was worried that he wasn't "fitting in" with the rest of the staff. What makes these comments interesting is that they are

about a public state college. Such institutions often have the reputation of being impersonal and bureaucratic, as opposed to having the "personal touch" of private colleges.

A student commented: "If a student hasn't gotten to know the president in a year then it's the student's damn fault. Everybody sees him walking around here. He's got those Monday meetings. He comes to all the events. I mean, he's really easy to see if you've got something you want to talk to him about. That's what's special about Family. How many places can a student get to know the president? We all call him 'Danny' (not to his face) because he's so familiar to us." The student's comment is particularly telling in an era of declining enrollments. One reason students come to the school, and one reason they stay at Family, is because the entire institution reflects concern and care for students as personified by the president's open door and the easy accessibility of all administrators.

Information

People mentioned that all segments of the institution were available to one another to help solve problems. Every Monday afternoon the president held an open house where any member of the college community could enter his office and talk to him. All segments of the community used the vehicle. As one administrator reported: "That's sacred time. The president wants to know the problems of the different constituencies. People seem to use it. He reflects through the open house that he really cares."

The president also believes in the power of the written word, especially with respect to external constituencies. It is not uncommon to read about Family State or the president in the local press. A survey done by the college discovered that the local citizenry had a positive, working knowledge of the president and the college. The president attends a multitude of local functions, such as the chamber of commerce and United Way meetings, and civic activities. He also invites the community onto the college campus.

Although mailings and written information are important vehicles for sharing information with external constituencies, oral discourse predominates among members of the institution. Internal constituencies appear well informed of decisions and ideas through an almost constant verbal exchange of information through both formal and informal means. Formal means of oral communication include task forces, executive council meetings, and all-college activities. At these

gatherings individuals not only share information but also discuss possible solutions to problems or alternatives to a particular dilemma.

The president's communicative style percolates throughout the institution. Information from top administrators is communicated to particular audiences through weekly meetings of individual departments. One vice president described the process: "The president's executive staff meets once a week and we, in turn, meet with our own people. There's lots of give and take. The key around here is that we're involved in a process to better serve students. Open communication facilitates the process. God help the administrator or faculty member who doesn't work for students."

Informal channels of communication at Family State are an equally, if not more important means for sharing and discussing ideas as well as developing an esprit de corps. The president hosts several functions each year at his house near campus. He brings together disparate segments of the college community, such as different faculty departments, for a casual get-together over supper, brunch, or cocktails. "This is like a family," explained the president. "Too often people don't have the time to get together and share with one another food and drink in a pleasant setting."

It is not uncommon to see many different segments of the institution gathered together in public meeting places such as the cafeteria or a lounge. In discussions with faculty, staff, and administrators, many people showed a working knowledge of one another's tasks and duties and, most strikingly, the student body.

Throughout the interviews individuals consistently mentioned the "family atmosphere" that had developed at the college. As one individual noted: "Everything used to be fragmented here. Now there's a closeness."

Strategy

Family State's decision-making process followed a formal sequence that nevertheless accommodated informal activity. Initiatives often began at the individual or departmental level, as with proposals to create a new program. Eventually the new program or concept ended up in the College Senate—composed of faculty, students, and administration. A subcommittee of the senate decided what action should be taken and recommended that the idea be accepted or defeated. The senate then voted on the issue. Once it had taken action, the next step

was presidential—accept the proposal, veto it, or send it back to the senate for more analysis. The final step was approval by the Board.

Formalized structures notwithstanding, a strictly linear map of decision analysis would be misleading. Most often the administration made decisions by widespread discussion and dialogue. “It’s participative decision making,” commented one individual. The president’s decisions existed in concrete, but individuals saw those decisions as building blocks upon which further, more participative decisions were made. “The key around here,” observed one administrator, “is that we’re involved in a process to better serve students. Open communication facilitates the process.”

Although, as noted, the college has adapted to its environment, the college did not rely solely on adaptive strategy. The president noted: “I don’t believe that an institution serves its culture well if it simply adapts. The marketplace is narrow and changes quickly.” Instead, the administration, particularly the president, has brought about change through an interpretive strategy based on the strategic use of symbols in the college and surrounding environment.

Chaffee defines interpretive strategy as ways that organizational representatives “convey meanings that are intended to motivate stakeholders” [9, p. 94]. Interpretive strategy orients metaphors or frames of reference that allow the organization and its environment to be understood by its constituents. Unlike strategic models that enable the organization to achieve goals or adapt to the environment, interpretive strategy proceeds from the understanding that the organization can play a role in creating its environment. Family State’s president accentuates process, concern for the individual as a person, and the central orientation of serving students. He does so through several vehicles, foremost among them being communication with constituencies and the strategic use of space and time.

The president’s use of space is an important element in his leadership style and implementation of strategy. He frequently extends his spatial domain beyond the confines of the college campus and into the city and surrounding towns. Conversely, invitations to the community to attend events at the college and utilize the library and other facilities have reduced spatial barriers with a city that otherwise might feel excluded. Informal gatherings, such as suppers at the president’s house, or luncheons at the college, have brought together diverse constituencies that otherwise have little reason to interact with one another. Moreover, the president has attended to the physical appear-

ance of the institution, making it an effective symbol to his constituencies that even the grounds demand excellence and care.

The president's symbolic use of space sets an example emulated by others. His open-door policy, for example, permeates the institution. Administrators either work in open space areas in full view of one another or the doors to their offices are physically open, inviting visits with colleagues, guests, or more importantly, students. The openness of the president's and other administrators' doors creates an informality throughout the college that fosters a widespread sharing of information and an awareness of decisions and current activities.

The president is also a visible presence on the campus. He spends part of every day walking throughout the institution for a casual inspection of the grounds and facilities. These walks provide a way for people to talk with him about matters of general concern and enable him to note something that he may not have seen if he had not walked around the campus. Administrators, too, interact with one another and with students not only in their offices but on the other's "turf." "The atmosphere here is to get to know students," said one administrator, "see them where they are, and not have a host of blockades so students feel as if they are not listened to."

The discussion of communication and space has made reference to time. The president continually integrates formal and informal interactions with his constituencies. According to his secretary and a study of the presidential calendar, about one and one-half hours per day are scheduled as "free time" that he uses as he sees fit—for reading, writing, or perhaps walking around the campus.

The president regularly schedules meetings with his executive circle or individuals such as the treasurer. The meetings revolve around both a mixture of formal agenda-like items and ideas or problems that either the president or his lieutenants feel they have. Although his schedule is generally very busy, it is not difficult to see the president. His secretary makes his appointments. She notes that if a faculty member or administrator asked to see the president, she would schedule an appointment when he was available in the very near future. Students, too, can see the president, but his secretary generally tries to act as a gatekeeper to insure that the students really need to see the president and not someone else.

Leadership

The president's awareness of patterns and styles of communication

and his conscious use of time and place are perhaps best illustrated by a meeting we had during one of our site visits to Family State. We waited in the president's outer office with the director of institutional research.

The door swung open and the president walked out to greet us. He said: "I'm sorry for being late. I knew about your appointment and had planned to be back here on time, but I was walking around the campus for forty-five minutes, and just at the last minute I made a detour to check out the cafeteria, to see how things were going. I met a guy down there who works in the kitchen and he and I have always said we should play cribbage some time (he's a cribbage player) and wouldn't you know he had a board with him today and he asked me to play. So I did. He beat me too. So I wasn't doing anything very presidential in being late for you. I was just walking around the campus on this beautiful day, and playing cribbage in the kitchen with a friend."

The president's disclaimer notwithstanding, his actions are presidential in that they develop and reinforce an institutional culture. His effective use of symbols and frames of reference, both formally and informally, articulates the college's values and goals and helps garner support from faculty, students, staff, and the community. This should not imply, however, that presidents should necessarily spend their time walking around campus or playing cribbage with the kitchen help. What is effective at one institution is unlikely to work at another. Nevertheless, the role of symbolic communication that we witness on this campus, buttressed by tangible, constructive change, provides valuable clues about effectiveness and organizational culture.

Tying the Framework Together

People come to believe in their institution by the ways they interact and communicate with one another. The ongoing cultural norms of Family State foster an implicit belief in the mission of the college as providing a public good. In this sense, staff, faculty members, and administrators all feel they contribute to a common good—the education of working-class students. When individuals apply for work at Family State, they are considered not only on the basis of skill and qualifications but also on how they will fit into the cultural milieu. Socialization occurs rapidly through symbols such as open doors, the constant informal flow of communication punctuated by good-natured kidding, access throughout the organization, dedication to hard work, and above all, commitment to excellence for students. When people

speak of their mission, they speak of helping people. Members of the college community work from the assumption that an individual's actions do matter, can turn around a college, and can help alter society.

Belief in the institution emerges as all the more important, given an unstable economic and political environment. The district in which the college resides has little political clout, and consequently the institution is not politically secure. Rapidly shifting employment patterns necessarily demand that the institution have program flexibility. Although the college has created programs such as medical technology and communication/media, it has not made widespread use of adaptive strategy.

"The strength of academic culture," states David Dill, "is particularly important when academic institutions face declining resources. During these periods the social fabric of the community is under great strain. If the common academic culture has not been carefully nurtured during periods of prosperity, the result can be destructive conflicts between faculties, loss of professional morale, and personal alienation" [21, p. 304]. Family State College exemplifies a strong organizational culture. Further, the academic culture nurtures academic excellence and effectiveness.

It is important to reiterate, however, that all effective and efficient institutions will not have similar cultures. The leadership exhibited by the president at Family State, for example, would fail miserably at an institution with a different culture. Similarly, the role of mission at Family State would be inappropriate for different kinds of colleges and universities. The rationale for a cultural framework is not to presume that all organizations should function similarly, but rather to provide managers and researchers with a schema to diagnose their own organizations.

In providing a provisional framework for the reader, I have neither intended that we assume the different components of the cultural framework are static and mutually exclusive, nor that an understanding of organizational culture will solve all institutional dilemmas. If we return to the Geertzian notion of culture as an interconnected web of relationships, we observe that the components of culture will overlap and connect with one another. In the case study, for example, the way the leader articulated organizational mission spoke both to the saga of the institution as well as its leadership.

How actors interpret the organizational "web" will not provide the right answers to simplistic choices. Rather, a cultural analysis em-

powers managers with information previously unavailable or implicit about their organization which in turn can help solve critical organizational dilemmas. As with any decision-making strategy, all problems cannot be solved simply because an individual utilizes a particular focus to an issue. For example, a specific answer to whether or not tuition should be raised by a particular percentage obviously will not find a solution by understanding culture. On the other hand, what kind of clientele the institution should have, or what its mission should be as it adapts to environmental change are critical issues that speak to the costs of tuition and demand cultural analysis.

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

Many possible avenues await the investigation of organizational culture. This article has provided merely the essential terms for the study of academic culture. A comprehensive study of organizational culture in academic settings will demand increased awareness of determinants such as individual and organizational use of time, space, and communication. In this case study, we observed the president's formal and informal uses of different cultural concepts. Individuals noted, for example, how they were well-informed of administrative decisions and plans primarily through informal processes. Evidence such as the president's casual conversations with administrators or walking around the campus were effective examples of the informal use of time. Further work needs to be done concerning the meaning and effective use of formality and informality with regard to time, space, and communication.

I have used the term "organizational culture" but have made no mention of its subsets: subculture, anticulture, or disciplinary culture. An investigation of these cultural subsets will provide administrators with useful information about how to increase performance and decrease conflict in particular groups. We also must investigate the system of higher education in order to understand its impact on individual institutions. For example, state systems undoubtedly influence the culture of a public state college in ways other than budgetary. A study of the influence of states on institutional culture appears warranted.

Each term noted in table 1 also demands further explication and analysis. Indeed, the concepts presented here are an initial attempt to establish a framework for describing and evaluating various dimensions of organizational culture. Developing such a framework is an iterative process that should benefit from the insights of further re-

search endeavors. An important research activity for the future will be the refinement and extension of this framework. The methodological tools and skills for such cultural studies also need elaboration.

By developing this framework and improving ways of assessing organizational culture, administrators will be in a better position to change elements in the institution that are at variance with the culture. This research will permit them to effect orderly change in the organization without creating unnecessary conflict. Moreover, the continued refinement of this framework will permit research to become more cumulative and will help foster further collaborative efforts among researchers.

References

1. Becher, T. "Towards a Definition of Disciplinary Cultures." *Studies in Higher Education*, 6 (1981), 109-22.
2. Becker, H. S. "Student Culture." In *The Study of Campus Cultures*, edited by Terry F. Lunsford, pp. 11-26. Boulder, Col.: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1963.
3. Bennis, W. "Transformative Power and Leadership." In *Leadership and Organizational Culture*, edited by T. J. Sergiovanni and J. E. Corbally, pp. 64-71. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
4. Bourdieu, P. "Systems of Education and Systems of Thought." *International Social Science Journal*, 19 (1977), 338-58.
5. Burrell, G., and G. Morgan. *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. London: Heinemann, 1979.
6. Bushnell, J. "Student Values: A Summary of Research and Future Problems." In *The Larger Learning*, edited by M. Carpenter, pp. 45-61. Dubuque, Iowa: Brown, 1960.
7. Cameron, K. S. "Measuring Organizational Effectiveness in Institutions of Higher Education." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 23 (1987), 604-32.
8. Chaffee, E. E. *After Decline, What? Survival Strategies at Eight Private Colleges*. Boulder, Col.: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1984.
9. _____. "Three Models of Strategy." *Academy of Management Review*, 10 (1985), 89-98.
10. Chaffee, E. E., and W. G. Tierney. *Collegiate Culture and Leadership Strategy*. New York: Macmillan, forthcoming.
11. Chait, R. P. "Look Who Invented Japanese Management!" *AGB Quarterly*, 17 (1982), 3-7.
12. Clark, B. R. "Faculty Culture." In *The Study of Campus Cultures*, edited by Terry F. Lunsford, pp. 39-54. Boulder, Col.: Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 1963.
13. Clark, B. R. *The Distinctive College*, Chicago, Ill.: Aldine, 1970.

14. _____. "Belief and Loyalty in College Organization." *Journal of Higher Education*, 42 (June 1971), 499-520.
15. _____. "The Organizational Saga in Higher Education." In *Readings in Managerial Psychology*, edited by H. Leavitt. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
16. Clark B. R. (ed.) *Perspectives in Higher Education*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1984.
17. Dandridge, T. C. "The Life Stages of a Symbol: When Symbols Work and When They Can't." In *Organizational Culture*, edited by P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis, C. C. Lundberg, and J. Martin, pp. 141-54. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1985.
18. Dandridge, T. C., I. Mitroff, and W. F. Joyce. "Organizational Symbolism: A Topic to Expand Organizational Analysis." *Academy of Management Review*, 5 (1980), 77-82.
19. Davie, J. S., and A. P. Hare. "Button-Down Collar Culture." *Human Organization*, 14 (1956), 13-20.
20. Deal, T. E., and A. A. Kennedy. *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1982.
21. Dill, D. D. "The Management of Academic Culture: Notes on the Management of Meaning and Social Integration." *Higher Education*, 11 (1982), 303-20.
22. Feldman, M. S., and J. G. March. "Information in Organizations as Signal and Symbol." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26 (1981), 171-86.
23. Freedman, M. *Academic Culture and Faculty Development*. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979.
24. Gaff, J. G., and R. C. Wilson. "Faculty Cultures and Interdisciplinary Studies." *Journal of Higher Education*, 42 (March 1971), 186-201.
25. Geertz, C. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.
26. Koprowski, E. J. "Cultural Myths: Clues to Effective Management." *Organizational Dynamics*, (1983), 39-51.
27. Krakower, J. Y. *Assessing Organizational Effectiveness: Considerations and Procedures*. Boulder, Col.: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1985.
28. March, J. G. "How We Talk and How We Act: Administrative Theory and Administrative Life." In *Leadership and Organizational Culture*, edited by T. J. Sergiovanni and J. E. Corbally, pp. 18-35. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1984.
29. Mitroff, I. I., and R. H. Kilmann. "Stories Managers Tell: A New Tool for Organizational Problem Solving." *Management Review*, 64 (1975), 18-28.
30. _____. "On Organizational Stories: An Approach to the Design and Analysis of Organizations through Myths and Stories." In *The Management of Organization Design*, edited by R. H. Kilmann, L. R. Pondy, and D. P. Slevin, pp. 189-207. New York: North Holland, 1976.
31. Mitroff, I. I., and R. Mason. "Business Policy and Metaphysics: Some Philosophical Considerations." *Academy of Management Review*, 7 (1982), 361-70.

32. Morgan, G., P. J. Frost, and L. R. Pondy. "Organizational Symbolism." In *Organizational Symbolism*, edited by L. R. Pondy, P. J. Frost, and T. C. Dandridge. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1983.
33. Ouchi, W. G. "Theory Z: An Elaboration of Methodology and Findings." *Journal of Contemporary Business*, 11 (1983), 27-41.
34. Ouchi, W. G., and A. L. Wilkins. "Organizational Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 11 (1985), 457-83.
35. Pace, C. R. "Five College Environments." *College Board Review*, 41 (1960), 24-28.
36. _____. "Methods of Describing College Cultures." *Teachers College Record*, 63 (1962), 267-77.
37. Peters, T. J., and R. H. Waterman. *In Search of Excellence*. New York: Harper and Row, 1982.
38. Pettigrew, A. M. "On Studying Organizational Cultures." *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24 (1979), 570-81.
39. Pfeffer, J. "Management as Symbolic Action: The Creation and Maintenance of Organizational Paradigms." *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 3 (1981), 1-52.
40. Pondy, L. R. "Leadership is a Language Game." In *Leadership: Where Else Can We Go*, edited by M. McCall and M. Lombardo, pp. 87-99. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978.
41. Putnam, L. L., and M. E. Pacanowsky (eds.) *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1983.
42. Quinn, R. E., and J. Rohrbaugh. "A Competing Values Approach to Organizational Effectiveness." *Public Productivity Review*, 5 (1981), 122-40.
43. Schein, E. H. "The Role of the Founder in Creating Organizational Culture." *Organizational Dynamics*, 12 (1983), 13-28.
44. _____. *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1985.
45. Smircich, L., and G. Morgan. "Leadership: The Management of Meaning." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 18 (1982), 257-73.
46. Tierney, W. G. "The Communication of Leadership." Working paper. Boulder, Col.: National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 1985.
47. _____. "The Symbolic Aspects of Leadership: An Ethnographic Perspective." *American Journal of Semiotics*, in press.
48. _____. *The Web of Leadership*. Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, forthcoming.
49. Trice, H. M., and J. M. Beyer. "Studying Organizational Cultures through Rites and Ceremonials." *Academy of Management Review*, 9 (1984), 653-69.
- Trujillo, N. "'Performing' Mintzberg's Roles: The Nature of Managerial Communication." In *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*, edited by L. L. Putnam and M. E. Pacanowsky. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1983.